

March 5, 2012

Security Message to U.S. Citizens

Recent security incidents involving violence and area taxis, and criminal methods employed in Asuncion

Recently, a U.S. citizen was robbed and assaulted at gunpoint near the corner of Dr. Weiss and Del Maestro. The victim stated that two men on a motorcycle approached the taxi she was in as it arrived in front of her residence. The men forced open the door to the taxi, stuck a handgun in her face and assaulted her. During the robbery the victim was struck on the arms and hands with the handgun. The men grabbed her purse from her shoulder and drove off. They were wearing helmets, and the motorcycle had no license plate. It appears that the men may have been aware the victim had just withdrawn a large sum of money from a local bank.

A week later, two U.S. citizens were being driven home in a taxi from the Carmelitas area and were assaulted by the taxi driver. The victims stated they took a taxi from the informal taxi stand located at the corner of España and Malutin, next to the Carmelitas area. The victims stated they were heading home, but the taxi driver seemed to be driving a circuitous route to their destination. They became concerned that the driver was trying to increase the taxi fare or worse so they questioned the driver's route and intentions. The driver got upset, raised his voice and made threats. The victims demanded that he pull over so they could get out. After a short period of time, the taxi driver pulled over approximately five blocks from their destination. They got out of the taxi and started to walk away, declining to pay the fare due to what had occurred. The driver then threatened the victims, implying he had a gun. The victims told him they were calling the police, and he left the area. The taxi driver returned a few minutes later and assaulted one of the victims as they were walking home, pushing him to the ground and punching him in the head. The second victim ran to seek help from a guard at a nearby store. When confronted by the guard, the taxi driver departed the area.

If you realize your taxi driver is taking you out of your way to increase the fare, it is not recommended that you engage in an argument with the driver while en route to your destination. Rather, wait until you get to your destination, pay the driver and obtain his name, cab number and license plate number. You then can call the Paraguayan Taxi Commission (021-333-737) to make a complaint.

A known tactic by criminals is to mark their victims prior to committing a criminal act. This is done by marking the sidewalk, tree or barrier in front of the house, or marking the tires on a vehicle with easily identifiable substances (e.g., spray paint, chalk). This identifies the vehicle or residence as a target to other criminals. This tactic has been utilized recently in Paraguay. If you see any unusual marking in front of your residence, or on your vehicle, please report it to the Police, remove the mark and inform the Embassy.

The above described incidents are a reminder of the type of crime that is occurring in Paraguay. Below are recommendations on how to avoid being a victim of an armed robbery or assault.

ARMED ASSAULTS AND ROBBERIES

The Regional Security Office at the Embassy has seen an increase in the use of firearms during

assaults and robberies in the greater Asuncion Metropolitan area. U.S. citizens are reminded to maintain good overseas security practices in their day-to-day activities:

- The first step to avoiding an attack is to stay alert at all times and be aware of your environment.
- Victims may be selected because they appear to be wealthy. Avoid wearing large amounts of jewelry or carrying expensive electronics (cameras, iPods, etc.).
- Avoid high crime areas, lesser traveled roads (rural areas), isolated areas in parking lots and dark streets.
- Avoid being time and place predictable and setting patterns in activities.
- Become familiar with your surroundings to make it easier to identify suspicious or out of place people and items.
- Keep emergency numbers readily available; provide your family with emergency numbers.
- Be alert to suspicious persons and/or activity in your neighborhood and report them to the Police.
- Don't open your doors to unannounced and unidentified persons.
- If someone tries to rob you, don't resist. In most instances, it is safest to be non-confrontational and give up your belongings.
- Remember: There is nothing of any material value that is worth more than the personal health and well being of you and your family.
- Report any suspicious activity to the Police and/or the Embassy RSO Office.
- *When hiring a taxi, it is generally safer to use the Asociacion de Taxistas de Asuncion by calling 021-331-080 rather than hailing a taxi on the street.*

U.S. citizens who travel to or reside in Paraguay are encouraged to enroll in the [State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). U.S. citizens without internet access may enroll directly with the U.S. Embassy in Asuncion. By enrolling, you make it easier for the U.S. Embassy to contact you in case of an emergency. Stay up to date by bookmarking our [Bureau of Consular Affairs website](#), which contains the current [Travel Warnings](#) and [Travel Alerts](#) as well as the [Worldwide Caution](#). Follow us on [Twitter](#) and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on [Facebook](#). You can also download our free [Smart Traveler iPhone App](#) to have travel information at your fingertips.

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The U.S. Embassy also encourages U.S. citizens to review "[A Safe Trip Abroad](#)," which includes valuable security information for those both living and traveling abroad. In addition to information on the Internet, travelers may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the U.S. and Canada or outside the U.S. and Canada on a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444.